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LB 1348

have other discussion later on, but those were just some questions I wanted to have answered. Thank you, Senator Wehrbein.

SENATOR CROSBY: Thank you, Senator Chambers. Senator Connealy.

SENATOR CONNEALY: Thank you, Senator Crosby, members. I rise in support of LB 1348. I prioritized this bill. I want to thank Senator Wehrbein for introducing this bill and the Ag Committee and the staff for working to make the bill more palatable here on the floor. I strongly believe that we have to do something now to address the serious economic crisis that exists in rural communities. I don't have an exact handle on how much economic development money we spend here in this state, but it's a lot of money. We spend hundreds of millions of dollars, and it can be said that economic development really works. I mean we have a robust urban economy here in the state. However, agriculture and rural communities and small businesses out there are in dire need of our support. Our rural areas are under tremendous pressures that are driven by the need for our communities to gain more income to supplement the lagging ag economy. They don't need just jobs; they need income. Although the troubles on the farm economy by and large are a federal issue, you know, we can control some of this. We can alleviate some of the economic pressures out in rural areas by doing some economic development. I applaud Senator Matzke and Senator Vrtiska and the Governor on their efforts. I recognize that we all believe that strong rural communities will help the whole state. But I think that we need to do more, more than this...than has been proposed. LB 1348 is the right direction for the Legislature and for the state to go. It contains several pieces that directly impact rural Nebraskans. First, the "microenterprise" is a...is a successful program that's working. It helps both urban and rural areas to start their own business. A study from the Center for Rural Affairs called "Trampled Dreams" showed that, from 1988 through '97, 70 percent of the new jobs in rural counties came from people starting their own business and in the "microenterprises" project does that. Currently, the "Microenterprise" Partnership Program is funded at \$250,000 and this bill raises that to \$875,000. As Senator Wehrbein said, this is what will be able to take it statewide. We...small businesses can grow to be big businesses.